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Remarks *on* Jamaica, Vermont

By
Judge F. M. BUTLER
RUTLAND, VERMONT

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JAMAICA

Jamaica lies about 72 degrees west longitude, and about 42 degrees north latitude. It has been said, "East Jamaica is the center of the Universe." Like Rome, all roads lead to East Jamaica, and Jamaica Village is only about four miles distant. You can go anywhere from Jamaica. We are in the same latitude of the great city of Paris—the emporium of fashion and finance, and about half way between it and the "Golden Gate." We can boast of the same latitude as the Mormon City of Ogden, on the Great Salt Lake, the seat of the Mormon, who claims Vermont as his birth-place, and on the direct line from Boston to Montreal. While not a great Metropolis in the modern sense, it can boast of the best people on earth and hope for the highest degree of civilization and culture. If we hope to improve on the natural, we must get close to nature, and here we can do it to perfection.

Jamaica, sealed in blood, born under strenuous circumstances, sustained and nurtured by forest and stream, she flourished in her mountain fastnesses, until the chinking of gold in the great northwest was distinctly heard over her mountains and up her fertile valleys. Before, however, the incentive had attained much force, she heard her country's call. Freely she poured out her blood on the altar of her country, when she heard the call to the boys of '61, and the

record of her population and her resources tells the sad story of the consequences.

Blood is the essence of life, and seals the destinies of Nations. It signifies the genuineness of the most sacred documents and testifies to the truth of the Book of Books. Within one thousand yards of the church, the blood of the first white man saturated the sacred soil and may be called the "Seal of the Town."

Buried beneath the turf, in the summer of 1748, lie the remains of four of Major Melvin's heroes. While on their way from the foot of Lake Champlain to Fort Dummer, resting their weary limbs near the confluence of Ball Mountain Brook, and the West River, Major Melvin, with eighteen men were attacked by a party of savage Indian warriors, who, though surprised, made a gallant defense. Six of their number were killed, while the others made their escape. John Haywood, Isaac Taylor, John Dodge, David Mann were subsequently buried in the meadow near the river. The Baptist cemetery is not far from the spot, but no monument yet marks the site.

This was more than twenty-five years before the first settlement was made in this town, and while the green hillsides and fertile valleys were then a dense forest. More than twenty-five years before New York State offered its \$500.00 reward for the arrest of the gallant Col. Ethan Allen, and forty years before the first highway was opened for travel from the Townsend line to the old Peaked Rock, where the covered bridge now stands over West River. It was in 1790 that this road was extended to the Windhall Line. No bridge, however, for many

years thereafter, was provided for the safe and comfortable passage of the traveler.

Chartered by the General Assembly, on November 7th, 1780, Jamaica comprised about 29,000 acres. It was a part of six grants, formerly named by the Governor of New York, but our revered Governor, Thomas Chittenden, by the authority vested in him, on the 7th of November, 1780, signed a grant to Samuel Fletcher, of Townsend, and sixty-seven others, conveying to them, this then, unappropriated territory. Thomas Chittenden, John Butler, Jabes Butler, and Ira Allen were among the number. Suspicion of graft was never once indulged in, although the grant ran to the Governor, himself, with the others, and no one ever accused the sixty-eight of paying for it in the coin of the realm. Their valuable services, however, were adequate compensation. Only twelve families then resided within the confines, and some of them didn't know it. Benjamin Fuller's house was the town house where they first met to organize.

Aaron Butler, born in the log house, under the shadow of the steep mountain, on the east side of the river, July 24th, 1783, spent his youth tilling that farm for his widowed mother. The trail from Fort Dummer to Lake Champlain then crossed the Green Mountains, through the present village of Jamaica, and along the westerly side of the river and crossed it by means of a ford, above the well known Peaked Rock. I have heard him repeat many times, the perils experienced while the waters were at flood height, in transporting travelers across the river in his log

canoe for a six-pence or four-pence, half-penny. It was no big price for the risk, but when the horn blew, which was left on the tree of the fordway, for the traveler's convenience, he felt bound to respond, though the price might be ever so great.

His father, Aaron Sr., was ensign in a Connecticut Regiment, belonging to the Continental Army. He was discharged by the expiration of his time of service from Company six, of the 8th Regiment, Connecticut Line, on Dec. 18th, 1775, and soon after, with his wife, he settled in the heart of the dense forest, on the meadow close to the foot of the mountain above the Peaked Rock, on the east side of the West River. Here they made a clearing and erected a log cabin. Three or four of their children were born in this cabin. The husband had re-enlisted and was home very little. He died on the 12th of March, 1787, leaving four small children. While the husband was engaged in the army, his wife cleared and cultivated the field and cared for her family.

Game was abundant, fish plentiful in the river, from which she supplied herself as the occasion required. Anne Story had her cave, but Thankful Butler made her fortress, her cabin. The black bear, the catamount, and the wolf were not uncommon visitors. The catamount was regarded as exceedingly vicious, and wolves, when hungry, and assembled in packs seeking prey, were frightfully so. It is said that at times they had no hesitation of entering the dwelling house without invitation when opportunity offered. My grandfather has told me the tale of an evening when he was a small boy, just as the sun was losing itself over the tree tops, looking

he valley to the westward, strange, but familiar sounds were heard in the distance. They came nearer. They listened at the corners of the house. The mother was alone with her four children, who were playing among the trees at the time. She called to the children and sent them inside, cautioning them to keep quiet. She took down her gun and waited in the doorway in silence. Not a sound was heard, save the dull moan of the evergreen and the frightful howl. Closer and closer came the pack of hungry wolves, howling and sniffing the air as they approached. Louder and louder they howled. It seemed as though there were hundreds joining the pack from every direction. The children held their breath. She waited in silence. When the fire of their eyes came within her vision she blazed away from her doorstep. The next morning, for no one ventured out that night, they found one of the pack lying dead before their door to tell the tale of what had happened. Many other interesting tales of adventure, deprivations and hardships, I have heard from the lips of my grandfather, who died at the mature age of 94.

It was but a few years earlier that William Howard, with his two sons, Caleb and Silas, made the first clearing within the limits of this town. They each erected houses near what is now the Wardsboro Station, and it is said, moved into their houses on the 16th day of June, 1775, the very day of the great Battle of Bunker Hill, and with great enthusiasm claimed they distinctly heard the roar of the cannon on that memorial day.

With only eleven or twelve families in town, the proprietors organized their township, September 3d,

1781. They had at a previous meeting appointed their surveyor and a committee to divide the town into lots. They voted that this committee for the lotting of the township should consist of five, and they should be paid 2 pounds and 2 shillings per week, and also for travel. It was also voted "that silver money and Vermont currency" should be used "as a tender to the proprietors's collector and no other." Continental currency was of doubtful value. Vermont had but recently declared her independence, January 15th, 1777, and the value of her money might well have been questioned.

Bankbills, the money of other states were in circulation. Many were counterfeit, some were by banks that had failed. The only remedy left to Vermont was to establish her own currency. It was not until April, 1781, that she first issued currency in bills, and her loyal citizens were ready to enforce their acceptance as money.

At the June session of the Legislature, 1785, Reuben Harmon, Jr., of Rupert, was granted the exclusive right to coin copper in this state for a term of two years, from and after the following July.

At the organization of this town, the civil government of the State of Vermont, was of vital public interest, and William Harrison Church was appointed the first Representative, notwithstanding Townsend had, the year before, unwittingly selected a Jamaica man to represent her at the Legislature. It was during the year 1781 that 35 Representatives on the east side of the Connecticut River in the present State of New

Hampshire, took their seats in the Legislature of Vermont, and it was that same year that the towns between the Hudson River and the present western boundary of this State, applied for admission to this commonwealth. It was that year that Canada began the intrigue through Beverly Robinson, to take over this State into the King's Dominion. This was previous to the time when Col. Ethan Allen, so many times rebuffed by Congress, had the courage to confront that body with the assertion, "I am as resolutely determined to defend the Independence of Vermont, as Congress is that of the United States, and rather than fail, I will retire with the Green Mountain Boys into the desolute caverns of the mountains and wage war with human nature."

It was within two months, prior to the granting of this charter, Congress having ignored the organization of the State of Vermont, both New York and New Hampshire claiming title thereto. Against the vigorous protest of the agents of this State, Col. Allen told the Congress, that if she continued to exercise her unjust policies, the people of this State "stand ready to appeal to God and the World, who must be accountable for the awful consequences which must ensue."

The value of her forests and fields began to be known abroad. The citizens began to feel that good government was assured and prosperity, such as had never before been known, came to her towns and hill-sides. Jamaica, with the other towns in this State, began to increase her population and wealth. For more than sixty years there seems to have been hardly a recession. In 1850, her population is given at 1606. Her grand list in 1841

had, however, reached its height of \$7,872.00. Her assessed valuation \$787,200.00. Highways had been constructed through all her valleys, and along her hill-sides, until she had probably the greatest mileage of any town in the county. Only three (3) towns today, in the county have greater mileage. In fact, she has more miles of highway to the dollar of grand list than any other town in the county.

The old cellar holes on her hillsides, the decaying orchards, and the almost interminable miles of stonewall, tell the irrefutable tale of the industry and thrift of her own ever increasing population. The people seem to almost forget that she was being rapidly drained of her wealth, and that a climax must needs come. From 1850 to 1860, while the clouds of the Civil War were gathering thick and fast, the town seems to have stood trembling at the very zenith of her wealth, population and power, hesitating whether to go backward or forward. Her population was given in 1860 as 1541, less than a hundred difference from that of 1850. Her wealth was practically the same. During this time her water power was beginning to be developed. Manufactures of lumber were flourishing. Hides and leather were being manufactured for market. They little realized what was to follow.

On the 14th of April, 1861, when Fort Sumter fell, excitement ran high. She heard the call for 75,000 volunteers and answered. She was an inland town, no railroads, no telegraph, no telephone, no automobiles or balloons. All the news came by the slow course of the stage-coach, and her merchandise

reached her by the six-horse teams. But the New York papers were eagerly sought, and the post-office was the center of excited crowds when the stage rolled in. Her interest in the Civil War was second to no town in the county. One-tenth in number of her population, within the next four years, she sent to the front. 160 names appear on the roll, her total voting strength today, women omitted. No town was more generous with her soldiers. She voted bounties, as high as \$500.00 each, to save the draft and fill her quota, until the public men of the county held their breath and exclaimed that she would be bankrupt. Nearly every man was enthusiastic, optimistic and loyal to the northern cause. She was justly proud of her record. There were just enough "Copper-heads" in town for amusement.

It was a year or two afterwards when the bitterness towards the "Copper-heads" had reached its height. I must tell a story of a scene which I well remember, although I do not recollect that it has been publicly repeated. Some of you, no doubt, will be able to verify its accuracy. The Jamaica company of enlisted men were training backwards and forwards, up and down the Main street, past the hotel, commanded by their officers, and led by the stirring music of a snare-drum and two fifes. Dr. Joel Holton, straight, tall, and handsomely built, played the snare-drum, Zelotus and Edmond Skinner, then vigorous and active, and full of enthusiasm, played their fifes. A United States Flag was strung upon a rope from the Mussey store to the Holton house and swung over the center of the Main street. I had come to the village with my

father to see the training and hear the music. I stood in front of the Mussey store with a large crowd of other boys, a little ahead, of course, of the old men, watching the proceedings. A neighbor had also come to the village for the same purpose. He was then a man of middle age, strong, vigorous, with a full long beard, broad shouldered, well built and would weigh probably 200 pounds. He had been talking quite loud and was the center of a small knot of men. The boys said he was a "copper-head." He declared that the soldiers were going South to commit murder for a few d——d niggers, and Jamaica would pay for it. I comprehended but little of the force of the few things I heard and fewer things I remembered, but the following circumstance I shall never forget. He stood in the center of a little group of men near the Mussey store as the company marched rapidly past the hotel and under the flag to the tune of "Yankee Doodle." They swung out into line and halted under the flag. The music stopped—they broke ranks—then rushed up to the Mussey store. The boys scattered, and I with the rest. They seized our neighbor, some by the whiskers, some by the shoulders, some by the arms, and forcibly led him down under the flag. They put his hat in his hand and commanded him to give three cheers for the flag. He hesitated. My hair stood up. I was frightened almost to death. They pulled his whiskers, and lifted him from behind for I saw their boots come away from him—they didn't wear shoes then—and repeatedly commanded him to cheer. The leaders started him off with "Hip- Hip" and he cheered for the flag and he cheered, and he cheered again. Between every cheer

they commanded him to cheer louder and encouraged him from behind and from in front, winding up with a tiger. Everybody held their breath while he cheered. It was amusing to the boys to hear the "old copper-head" yelling at the top of his voice, in the middle of the street, "Three cheers for the flag, Hoorah, Hoorah, Hoorah!" In less time than it takes to tell it, the bugle called, the soldiers rushed for the line, the command was given, three cheers went up for the flag from the "boys of 61," and the vigorous marching and countermarching went on as if nothing had interrupted. Every young man seemed anxious to go to war. The boys, younger of course, imitated their training as part of their sport.

Notwithstanding the ravages of war, business began to boom. Prices of everything increased tremendously. Horses were wanted for the cavalry. Cattle, for beef, and sheep for mutton. Within a few years wool was selling from 90c to \$1.00 a pound, and every farmer with a large flock of sheep seemed to have a fortune in prospect. On every hillside to the very peak, the pastures were covered with flocks.

The debt of Jamaica had become enormous. Soon after the close of the war, strenuous effort was made to reduce it. The seeming prosperity and wealth that poured into this town was like a phantom. It faded away like the dews of the morning. In ten years the population of Jamaica had decreased about one-fourth so that in 1870 the census gave a population of but 1223. Her manufacturing plants began to close. Her tanneries could not compete with the world.

Some inroads had been made into the war debt, when one morning a cloud appeared. The heavens grew dark and the rain began to fall. It was the terrible flood of '69 that was approaching. A mile of bridges were swept away, and the highways made the bed of the river. Thousands and thousands of dollars of damage to Jamaica, its highways and bridges, were added to her obligations in a single night. It was at this time that her foremost citizen, William H. Carr, a deputy sheriff, went down in the covered bridge over Ball Mountain Brook, in the streets of this village, and his body was recovered some days afterwards, within a few rods of the mouth of the Turkey Mountain Brook at East Jamaica. The covered bridge at the Peaked Rock came sailing down on its roof and side into the meadows opposite the East Jamaica School House, while the scholars on the bank watched and wondered if there was any truth in the sign of the rainbow. This covered bridge was afterwards taken to pieces and rebuilt with the same old timber on its present site where it stands today.

When the civil strife was over the free homesteads in the west, the fertile prairie and the pioneer disposition of her young men and maidens made irresistible appeals. The opening up of the Great West sapped all New England of her best blood and treasure. The sons and daughters of the east left the old homestead, and struck out for themselves, and when the course of life had ended, no one was left to fill the places made vacant. But no man will be able to estimate the thousands of dollars sent from the old home to assist

the boys whose high hopes of an eldorado were suddenly blasted.

1721976

But the "Copper-head" wholly misconceived the cause and purpose of that terrible strife. It was a war of self preservation, to preserve and establish freedom and liberty by an indissoluble union from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Gulf to Canada, through which the Mississippi might flow unvexed to the sea. The record of the men of Jamaica who responded to their country's call has never been fully written, but it was no mean one. On the contrary it is a record to which future generations will point with pride.

It was then, I believe, that Horace Greeley, in his New York Tribune, then the standard of authority of every thrifty farmer in Vermont, tendered his slogan "go west young man." It was a popular phrase. The sons and daughters of Vermont, with those of the New England States, became infected with the disease. Prices of farms, cattle, wool, butter, and every product of the farm, was rapidly decreasing in value, and with the boys away, when the old man stepped out, there was no one ready to purchase the farm. Its value was cut in half. The debt of the town was still staring the farmer in the face. He could no longer pay, with the depreciated "greenback" for the Congress decreed a resumption of specie payment and gold again became the standard. With Herculean effort, the men and women whose environment, health and business were such as to prevent emigration, taxed themselves to the limit, and again reduced the war debt. What a cruel thrust was that slogan "Go west young man," but Uncle

Sam's "homestead act" was still more terrible, it giving to every soldier and sailor a large tract of land in the great west. An invitation and reward to leave home forever. The Congress began from that time to make laws for the west at the expense of New England.

For the last forty years the east has been robbed, under the forms of law, to build and develop her great voluptuous sisters of the west without a murmur. Our own noble representatives have been deceived and misled into voting away our own prosperity. Taxed as we were, not only to build the dikes on the Mississippi, to protect and reclaim thousands of acres, and to irrigate millions of acres in the great west, we have been asked to invest in, oh yes, compelled to take stock in a thousand-mile railroad in Alaska. Do we realize that much of the greater portion of this money comes from New England and the east? The operation of the Government Income Tax is a good illustration. We can hardly complain of the robbery if we open the door and bid him enter, even though his argument is persuasive and eloquent.

Ultimately it will not help the Great States or the great railroads of the west to destroy the states and of the east that built them, but O, how long suffering and patient must we be? Must we wait until our towns are depopulated and grown again to forests, before we can persuade this great Government to be honest and reciprocate by laws equally favoring New England and the west?

Jamaica's shops, her tanneries, and her mills, were operating intermittently but the expense of transporta-

tion prevented fair competition with the world around her. Her school children were drifting away and her school-houses were going to decay. Schools which once flourished with 25 to 50 pupils could muster but 5 or 10. School districts had to be consolidated and some schools became extinct. It was urged upon the people, that railroad facilities were necessary.

Nothing less than rail transportation could save the town from bankruptcy. Authority was given by the Legislature and the old town in the throes of despair voted bonds to the extent of eight times her grand list to provide such facilities. It was declared that there was no great loss without some small gain, and if she had no other help or return from the railroad stock with which to pay the debt, she would certainly be able to tax the right-of-way, the two stations at Jamaica and East Jamaica and such other property as the railroad would bring. With a hint of Railroad Shops at Jamaica values would increase. This turned out to be wholly fallacious. Then came the crisis of 1882. Almost before the ink was dry on the shares of stock and before the railroad was completed, the Legislature of the State of Vermont passed a law in 1882, providing that all railroad property so used should be taxed upon its gross earnings and the money be paid into the State Treasury. The best part of her meadows, of her river farms, came out of her grand list. The debt had mounted up by leaps and bounds. The State had taken part of her property with which she was to pay it and has never repaid it to her. When the good men voted the \$33,000 to aid the Railroad they were taxed to the town on an appraised valuation. Had that policy been continued the taxes at the present rate would have wholly paid

the debt. The present appraisal of the West River Railroad is more than \$12,000 per mile. There is at least 6 miles in this town or a valuation of \$72,000. Taxes at half your present rate of taxation would bring around \$1200 a year. This right of way was your property when this debt was contracted. The state took it by force but it didn't pay your debt. Was not this legalized larceny?

In 1908 the Legislature attempted in a measure to make restitution but it failed by the veto of the Governor. The press was all too powerful and the Governor too zealous for popular favor. I hold that no state can afford to commit robbery, although it legalizes it when it takes away the means with which you can pay your honest debt and yet compels you to pay that debt.

This was your property. The State laid its heavy hand upon you and took it out of your list by force. It has never made restitution. Confiscation is larceny. No subtifuge can change its character. It is as wicked and reprehensible for a government to take a canal or a railroad, the property of a town or municipality, as for an individual to steal your money. It is no less reprehensible to take your money by force and use it to offer premiums to the young men of the East to forsake their homes to build and develop the lands, thus by force to take your town, or any part of it, without providing remuneration.

But what makes a town prosperous and happy is unity of ideal, purpose and effort. The people of Vermont only became a State by their United Resolve to defend their homes against the courts of Albany made up of Claimants to her soil.

Let her not be carried away by oriental customs, put forth as slogans of reform, but when urged to take bricks from the walls of scientific constitutional government, and weaken the structure of constitutional liberty, for which she fought and bled, let her remember the heroic words of Allen so often quoted, "The gods of the valley are not the gods of the hills."

The wealth of the town, after all, is the character of her people. Incubated in the home of industry, frugality and truth; brooded under the wing of faith; fed at the breast of hope; and sustained by the fellowship of love, character will ring true and the people will be prosperous and happy so long as faith, hope, and love shall unite and not disappear from her firesides.

"Pity the child that must blush for his parents. Envy the man who is proud of his race and his home. The son who forgets his father will soon be forgotten by his children." The child who forgets the place of his birth is unworthy to be remembered by it. It is said that the patriarchs were wont to weave reverence and romance about the sepulchers where the bones of their ancestors lie buried. Bethlehem has become sacred. Our Bethlehem should touch the tender spot of our nature.

Speech by Judge Fred M. Butler, at Jamaica, Vt., on
Old Home Day, Aug. 10, 1922.

Let me say to you, in a word, that the people of this old town are not a whit behind the generations that have passed on. The resources of the town are

not exhausted. You have the ability and resources at hand which may yet be developed to make this a thrifty, prosperous and happy people. This town will never be a metropolis until the aeroplane is the common public conveyance; your highways are built of cement or rubber; your freight comes and goes by motor truck or wireless, and your houses are heated and lighted by radio. When that time comes steam railroading will be a lost art.

The source of all power is electrical energy. Within your limits you have an immense supply of this energy stored up among these hills, waiting to be harnessed. A power, almost, if not quite, equal to any in the county.

Your bridges on the main highways, above 10 feet span, should be taken over, inspected, built and protected by the state. They were never built to sustain the present traffic. The automobiles and auto-trucks are an added burden for which the towns should not be liable to provide.

It was 45 years ago this present month that I packed my little trunk with a few handkerchiefs, collars and shirts, and three or four books, took the stage coach across the Green Mountains to a land of strangers, seeking, not a fortune, but a subsistence for myself and little family. I was unacquainted with a person west of the Green Mountains, save one whom I had met but a few months before.

At that time, Jamaica was a back town, no railroads, no telegraph, no telephones, no automobiles, no aeroplanes. The only public conveyance was by stage coach, and for freight the 6-horse team. The War of

1861 had left us with a heavy debt, and a population reduced from 1541, in 1860, to about 1000, in 1877. This old town, however, was left in good hands; there was no place for me; two able lawyers occupied the field; among them was Judge Waterman, who sits beside me, with whom I had completed my law course, (so if I lack in qualifications, you must charge it up to him).

I left many able, thrifty, active men such as Abijah Mussy, Judge Hoyt H. Wheeler, Dr. Joel Holton, Maj. W. H. H. Holton, Hon. Daniel Sherwin, Zelotus Skinner, Edmond Skinner, Asa Fulton, Henry Fulton, John Mussy, Pheletus Kellogg, L. N. Sprague, John Q. Shumway, my father, and scores of others, all dead now, except Judge Waterman, and he left town. He was not to blame for that for circumstances warranted it. All these men were of mature age, and deeply interested in its welfare. The generation that had prospered in times past, from 1790, when the first highway, from the Peaked Rock, at the West River bridge to Winhall line, was built, then, had all passed away. On top of the large war debt, the great flood of 1869, in which a mile of bridges were swept away, had left the town loaded with a tremendous debt. They were then struggling for an outlet by railroad, afterwards built, for which the town bonded 8 times its grand list, so that, at one time, there was a mortgage of \$2.00 upon every acre of land in town to cover its indebtedness.

When I addressed you 8 years ago, at your first old Home Day, this debt had been largely reduced, and I am told today that this debt has been almost completely discharged. You have borne the load bravely

and successfully. You are to be congratulated. New energy has moved forward with great strides.

I am glad of an opportunity to supplement what I have already said at the Old Home Day celebration, notwithstanding my time is limited. When I learned that there were several good men present who we all hope to hear from, and of the ball game now on, I begin to wonder where my allotted fifteen minutes comes in. I assure you I shall be exceedingly brief. As requested, however, I must take the time to say that I am glad to meet you, and greet you, on this Old Home Day, to which I have been so cordially invited.

*“There is no friend like an old friend,
Who shared our morning days;
No welcome like his greeting,
No homage like his praise.”*

When I visit this amphitheatre and look upon these green hills and the rippling brooks, your wide streets, the old hotel, and old, but comfortable dwellings, and see your cheerful faces, although unfamiliar, I count you all as old friends and deem it a great privilege to enjoy your personal acquaintance. With your resources, energy and ability and push, it is within your power to be thrifty, prosperous and happy.

